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STATE ORGANIZATION AS A POLITICAL INDICATOR

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## STATE ORGANIZATION AS A POLITICAL INDICATOR

To rephrase an old saw, evaluating the character and orientation of political regimes requires that analysts pay close attention to what they do and look like, rather than what they say or claim to be. More precisely, informed analysis of national political systems involves understanding in detail the structure and function of their respective economic, military, political, and social frameworks. For those with a policy-making role, this provides an opportunity to get a more precise "fix" on the nature and objectives of foreign regimes, which in turn permits them to frame or tailor their approaches towards these regimes according to the specific conditions of each case. More often than not, it has been an inability to grasp the intricacies and idiosyncracies of foreign political systems that has led policy-makers to adopt approaches based on erroneous assumptions or conclusions that result in the exacerbation, rather than the amelioration of existing international differences.

The ability to accurately assess and forecast the character of foreign political systems has become a particularly acute concern in recent years, in light of the overthrow of seemingly stable regimes in number of countries and the emergence of sub- and supra-national actors such as terrorist or irridescant groups, religious extremists, and/or revolutionary or nationalist movements that threaten to dramatically alter the political and economic "rules of the game" and the basic character of governing regimes in a variety of countries. This concern has even spawned a new growth industry, in the form of political risk analysis for both the public and private sectors.

The convergence of pragmatic and scholarly interests in the field of foreign area studies and international relations has traditionally led the



national state as a major social actor, then turn to a discussion of how study of national state organization can provide an important analytic tool for students of comparative politics as well as policy-makers.

Over the last thirty years, the study of comparative politics has moved from a broad concern with the general characteristics of national political systems towards a more specific interest in identifying variables that exert a conditioning, when not determining influence over the character and course of national political development. Modes of production, relationship with and role in the international economy, class conflict, political parties, wars (either civil or foreign), leadership styles, ethnic and cultural diversity -- these are just some of the range in variables that are claimed to play a major hand in shaping the character of national political systems. As such, they are given much attention by the academic and policy-making communities alike.

Within the last two decades, attention has turned towards political regimes as intervening variables whose nature and objectives have an immediate impact on the general structure and orientation of national political systems. As the collection of economic, political, and social actors that gain control of the reigns of government, political regimes exercise a profound influence over the countries they rule. Their very character is believed to represent a manifestation of the ongoing tensions, struggles, and changes experienced by a society, with regime change representing the formal shift in status and relationship of a variety of contending groups and actors. Depending on factors such as their method of gaining power, ideological orientation, political support base, social origins, economic, political, and social objectives, and use of coercion, a number of different regime types have been identified, of which liberal and social democratic, military and personalist authoritarian, and religious or party

that all regimes enjoy an equal capacity to alter the role, functions, and structure of the national state apparatus. What this does imply is that the impact of contextual factors and systemic variables such as class or ethnic conflict, economic conditions, foreign relations, and more general demographic trends on the national state apparatus are most often, albeit dissimilarly, filtered through the ideological and pragmatic policy lens of the political regimes that hold direct control over it. As a result, the national state apparatus behaviorally and organizationally reflects the relationship of political regimes with their respective societies. That is, the structure of the national state apparatus responds closely to the nature and thrust of regime objectives, which in turn revolve around the circumstances surrounding its ascension and tenure in power, its conception of what society should be, the way it proposes to organize society in order to achieve this vision, and the capacity of other social actors to assist or resist the pursuit of regime objectives. Over time, the structure of the state apparatus also is sequentially influenced by regime change and the feed-back generated by society in response to their different objectives and programs. Here again, even this varied feedback is most often filtered by regimes before being translated into reorganizational efforts within the national state apparatus. Hence, the very nature of organizational roles, functional objectives, and structural frameworks, as well as the definition of areas of priority within the national state apparatus, are all a direct reflection of the political regime that controls the apex of the state.

Even so, why should political analysts and policy-makers concern themselves with the seemingly labyrinthian details of national state organization in order to discern regime character and intentions? Do not such tools as

organizations are variably structured in different countries, and they may be embedded in one sort or another of a constitutional-representative system of parliamentary decision-making and electoral contexts for key executive and legislative posts."<sup>5</sup> We might add that they are integral elements of non-representative and non-competitive political systems as well.

Most immediately, the national state apparatus represents the organizational manifestation of a regime's basic program of action, which at a minimum includes the economic, military, political, and social spheres. As the main instrument for the application of regime programs, the structure of the national state apparatus provides the most concrete indicator of what their objectives are, since implementation requires an organizational capacity to do so, and since organizational change tends to come after substantial deliberation and is less susceptible to disguise or quick reversal. In addition, while certain regimes may suspend the activities of policy-making branches of government such as the legislature and judiciary (i.e. narrow the apex of the state), and/or limit the input of groups outside the regime, the implementary branches of the state -- that is, central administrative agencies such as ministries, departments, secretariats, bureaus and councils, as well as important decentralized, semi-autonomous, or quasi-public entities such as state enterprises, research centers, etc. -- remain as the principal forum in which regimes attempt to translate policy objectives into programs of action.

Finally, the range and complexity of the tasks performed by the national state apparatus guarantee that it will represent the highest form of indigenous organizational expression in most national political systems (particularly in later-developing countries), and that it will therefore be able to mobilize the largest amount of resources in pursuit of regime objectives. For all these reasons, the national state apparatus is the institutional framework

has often been used as a benchmark for measuring political development.<sup>7</sup> However, while this may be an accurate indicator for stable political systems, it is far less certain that the same is true for unstable political systems.

The reason for this is because, as Weber noted, at its highest level the state evolves politically as well as functionally.<sup>8</sup> We have mentioned that in all societies the national state and its specialized agencies become the principal objective of contending political actors, since the state is considered to be the primary vehicle for the achievement of the economic, military, political, and social goals of those who gain control of the reins of government -- that is, the apex of the state. In stable political systems characterized by regime continuity, however, "rules of the game" governing the competition between social groups and political actors are the product of a long and complex process of social group interaction (i.e. conflict or cooperation over time) that culminate in the establishment of a fundamental set of guidelines that in turn codify the basic character of the political system. Here the state serves as the guarantor and regulator of the political and socio-economic parameters of society, enforcing through legal norms and official coercion social group adherence to the established "rules of the game."<sup>9</sup> Institutional reform within the national state apparatus is therefore predicated upon an abiding interest in dynamic systems maintenance, which precludes dramatic structural alterations that could lead to transformations in the "rules of the game" and basic parameters of society.

This should not be construed to mean that significant structural alterations within the national state apparatus do not occur in stable political systems. As Theda Skocpol has pointed out when discussing notions of state autonomy in advanced industrial democracies, "the very structural potentials (for autonomous state actions) change over time, as the



endeavoring to reorganize and reorient the state in order to impose a framework that is more amenable to their particular, and often very opposed objectives. Regardless of the form of regime change -- revolution, coup d' etat, voluntary withdrawal from power and subsequent elections, etc. -- one likely result in all such instances is the promulgation of substantial institutional reform programs designed to promote new rules and better prepare the national state apparatus for the pursuit of new regime objectives in designated areas of major concern. Organizational change is most noticeable after a transfer of power occurs (often violently) between regimes with significantly different or opposed objectives, such as in the case of the Somoza and Sandinista regimes in Nicaragua and the Pahlavi and Khomeini regimes in Iran, to cite but two recent examples. In any event, the national state apparatus in unstable political systems sequentially reflects the dissimilar projects of different regimes, which has a decided influence on both its short-term organization and its long-term development.

The basic point to be stressed is that in all national political systems shifts at the level of national political authority are frequently evident in organizational change within the national state apparatus. The more profound the shift (i.e. regime rather than government change), the more significant the reforms that are likely to be made in the basic structure of the state. More importantly, the nature of these reforms offers a good indication of the character and intentions of the regimes that control the state at given points in time.

The scope of national state activity extends over a broad range of human endeavor, offering further proof of the status of the state as a major social actor. Even so, there exist a more narrow array of primary or essential functional tasks -- here referred to as "core" areas of state activity -- that hold the attention of all regimes regardless of their particular character and

organizational framework, degree of bureaucratic entrenchment, and mission of specific agencies, the influence of larger contextual factors such as wars, international economic conditions, natural disasters, etc., and/or the need to maintain intact certain branches of the national state. For example, Foreign service and national defense agencies, although evidencing changes in policy orientation under different regimes, often remain organizationally stable regardless of regime change or basic differences in regime type. The requirements of consistent diplomatic relations and national security frequently outweigh demands for the structural overhaul of the foreign service and military branches, particularly when regimes are confronted by more pressing domestic concerns that require a more immediate response from or reform within the agencies responsible for them, or need to maintain diplomatic relations or military postures whose disruption can be ill-afforded at a particular juncture in time. Although this is not always the case, the point remains that depending on the specifics of context and circumstance, organizational reform is most likely to occur in branches of the state connected with pressing domestic issues rather than in externally-oriented agencies.

This fact transcends national boundaries. Witness, for example, the general congruence in the organization of the foreign service and military arms of such dissimilar political systems as are those of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Here the organizational differences between the two political systems, as well as the basic differences in regime type, are most evident in those areas concerned with the internal ordering of society rather than in those involved in maintaining their external positions. Even so, if we move to a microanalytic level of analysis along the lines I am about to propose, we are able to identify certain organizational traits in these externally-oriented branches that help to further distinguish between the character and orientation of the two regimes.

"core" or primary areas in which organizational features and change are most significant (and likely to occur), I shall now propose a methodological framework with which to undertake an analysis of national state organization in detailed, yet comprehensive fashion.

Despite their respective inadequacies as explanatory frameworks for analyzing the specific structure of the national state apparatus in relation to regimes (since they seldom have bridged the gap between theory and praxis or managed to associate organizational change within the state to regime type and regime change), we can extract from the collective literature on bureaucracies, comparative public administration, complex organizations, and the state several dependent variables that when combined within a single analytic construct accomplish what each could not do alone. To do so, we must group these variables within a methodological framework that combines a structuralist-functionalist approach with a micro-analytic and diachronic focus.

The structuralist-functionalist aspect of this approach has been alluded to at some length over the preceeding pages, and specifically refers to the emphasis accorded the structure and function of branches of the state involved in "core" areas of activity. The diachronic focus refers to the fact that the analysis should be taken over time and (if applicable) across regimes. This will allow observers to better relate organizational change within the national state apparatus to the context in which such changes occur, and specifically to the regimes that sequentially gain control over it. Finally, the microanalytic orientation implies the use of several dependent variables grouped into three broad organizational categories that constitute the essence of complex organizations such as the national state apparatus. These categories are structure, budget, and personnel.

variables and the questions that guide the analysis must be viewed in light of the general context and specific circumstances surrounding a regime's emergence and subsequent consolidation, as well as the evolving systemic factors mentioned earlier. This allows us to see how regimes define and approach particular "core" areas, the influence this approach has on the state's role and orientation, and the impact the structure and functions of state organizations in "core" areas consequently has on the society at large. By doing so, we are able to draw a revealing picture of the character and intentions of the regimes in question.

Using this type of framework, traits such as linear, radial, or pyramidal organization and authority hierarchies, centralized or decentralized formulation and implementation procedures and networks, sectoral reorganizations and transfers, directive or non-directive budgetary flows within and across agencies, and general personnel characteristics all take on an importance beyond that of mere administrative descriptors in the public sector. Each of these variables tells us something about the regime that is shaping them.

It should therefore not be surprising to see that the resurgence of interest in the state has brought with it questions about the relationship between regime type and specific forms of national state organization. More precisely, it appears that there is a close "elective affinity" between regime types and the different types of structural frameworks erected within the national state apparatus, and that this affinity is a product of design rather than chance. For example, much has been written about the centralized versus decentralized hierarchical structures of the Soviet and U.S. States, respectively. In both cases, the structure of the national state apparatus is perceived to be a direct reflection of the political regimes governing each country. Though there is relatively little on the subject, we can hypothesize



superimposing of functions and responsibilities, and a clientalistic orientation. At a budgetary level, the financial autarchy exhibited by individual branches of the state apparatus fosters a competitive process of resource allocation among them.

Bureaucratic authoritarian regimes<sup>17</sup> promote a highly formalized pyramidal hierarchical structure culminating in a unitarian concentration of power within the military-controlled executive branch that serves as the apex of the state, and in which national political authority is divided, often unequally, among the different services of the armed forces. Formal links with civil society are narrowed considerably, while informal links with privileged sectors of society are strengthened. Unhindered by the competing pressures exerted by civil society at large, policy formulation and decision-making authority is delegated to sectoral or technically-defined elites within the regime. The organizational framework exhibited by the state apparatus is marked by functional rationalization and a de-concentration of responsibilities, an efficiency-based orientation, the use of parallel hierarchies for control purposes (with military hierarchies paralleling normal civilian bureaucratic channels), and the adoption of principles of subsidiarity (where the state takes a secondary role to the private sector and more local jurisdictionss in designated areas of endeavor). Military and ideological criteria dominate the personnel recruitment process, which among other things results in a purge of civilian personnel in many agencies. Budgetary authority is vested in planning agencies connected to the executive branch, and subsequently designated according to authoritarian (i.e. non-competitive) allocation procedures. Normative autonomy within branches of the state is low, owing to the concentration of decision-making authority in the hands of the military leadership and selected regime elites, while operative autonomy

exception of the afore-mentioned resource extraction, internal control, and security branches, budgetary allocations are reduced across the board, and are directed towards personnel related outlays in control agencies rather than infrastructural improvements (with the exception of defense). Depending on the crisis preceeding the installation of these regimes, direct military control down to the departmental level in key areas is sometimes substituted for parallel control hierarchies.

Populist authoritarian regimes award emphasis to those "core" areas of the state involved in maintaining domestic order and providing public goods. This entails not only expansion on all three organizational levels of the agencies involved in these activities, but of the very definition of these activities as well. This includes a general broadening of the state's "paternalistic" role in society, centralization of control and decision-making authority at all levels within the national state apparatus, emphasis on "external" service-related functions rather than "internal" administrative agencies, and the subordination of local jurisdictions to the requirements of national programs. Personnel recruitment procedures tend to be highly ascriptive, cooptive, and ideologically motivated in more political agencies (such as national labor administration), but much less so in technical agencies with only indirect political functions (such as national health administration). Budgetary expansion in all areas is accompanied by irregular allocation procedures dominated by personalist and political expedient criteria.

Limited democratic regimes<sup>20</sup> couple broad budgetary restraint in all areas with administrative decentralization, functional compartmentalization, professional and merit-based recruitment patterns, emphasis on personnel-related outlays over capital expenditures, and a narrowing of the state's role that respects provincial and local jurisdictional authority in accordance with

national contexts. Finally, at a time when a large portion of the academic community find themselves at odds with the policy-making sector over the substance and course of foreign policy, this may well offer a means of reconciling scholarly rigor and objectivity with the pragmatic orientation that (should) underlie policy decisions taken with respect to foreign political regimes.

<sup>7</sup>Among others sharing this view, see L. Binder, et al., Crisis and Sequences in Political Development. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971; J. La Palombara, ed., Bureaucracy and Political Development. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963; and F. Riggs, Frontiers in Development Administration. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1971.

<sup>8</sup>Weber, "The Fundamental Concepts of Sociology," op. cit., pp. 154-155.

<sup>9</sup>The notion of "rules of the game" elaborated here is derived from that offered in V.N. Perez-Diaz, State, Bureaucracy, and Civil Society. London: MacMillan Press, 1971, p. 95.

<sup>10</sup>Skocpol, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>I do not mean to imply that in all cases this involves the pluralist group competition, free regular elections, and institutionalized political uncertainty associated with liberal democracies. In non-representative, non-competitive regimes such as those dominated by a party or the military, external systemic pressures are translated into dynamic interplay within the dominant elites, who translate the outcomes of this intra-group competition into structural reforms within the state. The evolutionary nature of the state apparatus under the seemingly monolithic regimes in China and the Soviet Union attests to the dynamism and pervasiveness of structural change under stable political regimes regardless of their specific character.

<sup>12</sup>We might compare, for example, the Albanian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Cuban, Rumanian, and Yugoslavian states.

<sup>13</sup>Skocpol, op. cit., contains a bibliographic review of the major recent works in this vein. Also see Stephen Krasner, "Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics," Comparative Politics, V. 16, N. 2 (January 1984), pp. 223-252; and the reply to Krasner by Howard H. Lentner, "The Concept of State: A Response to Stephen Krasner," Comparative



<sup>18</sup>According to Oszlak, "patrimonialism is the domination of one individual, who requires functionaries to exercise his authority . . . all government positions originate in the administration of the monarch's or dictator's domestic community. Although in modern times he assumes the role of president or the equivalent, and surrounds himself with formal democratic institutions, he exercises in fact a quasi-monopoly over all decisions related to the appointment, replacement, transfer, or demotion of officials at all levels of government." "Políticas Publicas y Regimes Políticos," op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>19</sup>Regime Change and State Development in Postwar Argentina. Chicago: Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago, 1985.

<sup>20</sup>By "limited democratic," I refer to an elected, civilian regime that exhibits all the formal characteristics of liberal democracies, but which due to the circumstances of the electoral competition that preceeded its installation (when certain political groups were excluded from participating) is not fully representative of the polity in question. This was the case with both the Frondizi (1958-1962) and Illia (1963-1966) regimes in Argentina, and applies to such as the Duarte regime currently governing El Salvador.

<sup>21</sup>The notion of democratic regimes attempting to provide institutional frameworks within the state with which to promote the structural bases for democratic class compromise is derived from arguments offered by Adam Przeworski and Michael Wallerstein, "The Structure of Class Conflict in Democratic Capitalist Societies," American Political Science Review, V. 76, N. 2 (June 1982), pp. 215-238, and Przeworski, "Class Compromise and the State:

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